

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

In re application of

Tetsuji TOGAWA et al.

Serial No. NEW : Attn: Application Branch

Filed August 7, 2001 : Attorney Docket No. 2001-1103

**POLISHING APPARATUS
(Rule 1.53(b) Divisional
of Serial No. 09/132,482,
Filed August 11, 1998)**

PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT

Assistant Commissioner for Patents,
Washington, DC 20231

Sir:

Prior to examination of the above-referenced U.S. patent application please amend the application as follows:

IN THE SPECIFICATION

Please amend the specification as follows:

Please insert the following paragraph beginning at page 1, before line 3:

This is a Divisional Application of prior U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/132,482, filed August 11, 1998 which is a Divisional Application of prior U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 08/697,167, filed August 20, 1996, and now U.S. Patent No. 5,830,045.

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 10, line 15 to page 11, line 2 with the following rewritten paragraph:

The cleaning units 7a, 7b and 8a, 8b may be of any desired types. For example, the cleaning units 7a, 7b which are positioned near the polishing units 1a, 1b may be of the type which

scrub both sides, i.e., face and reverse sides, of a semiconductor wafer with rollers having respective sponge layers, and the cleaning units 8a, 8b which are positioned near the wafer storage cassettes 2a, 2b may be of the type which supply a cleaning solution to a semiconductor wafer that is being held at its edge and rotated in a horizontal plane. Each of the cleaning units 8a, 8b also serves as a drying unit for spin-drying a semiconductor wafer under centrifugal forces until it is dried. The cleaning units 7a, 7b can perform a primary cleaning of the semiconductor wafer, and the cleaning units 8a, 8b can perform a secondary cleaning of the semiconductor wafer which has been subjected to the primary cleaning.

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 12, line 19 to page 13, line 18 with the following rewritten paragraph:

As shown by solid lines, a semiconductor wafer is transferred from the storage cassette 3 a to the reversing unit 5. The semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the reversing unit 5 to the first polishing unit 1a after being reversed in the reversing unit 5. The semiconductor wafer is polished in the first polishing unit 1a and transferred therefrom to the cleaning unit 7a where it is cleaned. The cleaned semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the cleaning unit 7a to the second polishing unit 1b where it is polished. The semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the second polishing unit 1b to the cleaning unit 7b where it is cleaned. The cleaned semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the cleaning unit 7b to the reversing unit 6. The semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the reversing unit 6 to the cleaning unit 8b after reversed in the reversing unit 6. The semiconductor wafer us then transferred from the cleaning unit 8b to the storage cassette 2a after being cleaned and dried in the cleaning unit 8b. The transfer robots 4a, 4b use the respective dry fingers when handling dry semiconductor wafers, and the respective wet fingers when handling wet semiconductor wafers. The pusher 12 of the polishing unit 1a, which receives the semiconductor wafer to be polished from the transfer robot 4b, is elevated and transfers the semiconductor wafer to the top ring 13 when the top ring 13 is positioned above the pusher 12. The semiconductor wafer which has been polished is rinsed by a rinsing liquid supplied from a rinsing liquid supply device which is provided at the pusher 12.

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 13, line 19 to page 14, line 7 with the following rewritten paragraph:

After the semiconductor wafer is subjected to primary polishing in the polishing unit 1a, the semiconductor wafer is removed from the top ring 13 of the polishing unit 1a, and rinsed at the position of the pusher 12, and then cleaned in the cleaning unit 7a. Therefore, any abrasive liquid containing abrasive grains adhering to the polished surface, the reverse side of the polished surface, and side edge of the semiconductor wafer due to the primary polishing in the polishing unit 1a is completely removed. Then, the semiconductor wafer is applied to a secondary polishing in the polishing unit 1b, and then cleaned by the primary cleaning process of the cleaning unit 7b and the secondary cleaning process of the cleaning unit 8b. Thereafter, the polished and cleaned semiconductor wafer is spin-dried and returned to the storage cassette 2a. In the serial processing, polishing conditions of the primary polishing and secondary polishing are different from each other.

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 14, line 9 to line 16 with the following rewritten paragraph:

In the parallel processing, a semiconductor wafer is polished in a single polishing process. Two semiconductor wafers are simultaneously polished, and all of the four cleaning units 7a, 7b, 8a, 8b are operated to clean semiconductor wafers. One or both of the storage cassettes 2a, 2b may be used. In the illustrated embodiment, only the storage cassette 2a is used, and there are two routes in which semiconductor wafers used are processed.

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 14, line 17 to page 15, line 2 with the following rewritten paragraph:

In one of the routes, as shown by solid lines, a semiconductor wafer is transferred from the storage cassette 2a to the reversing unit 5. The semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the reversing unit 5 to the polishing unit 1a after being reversed in the reversing unit 5. The semiconductor wafer is polished in the polishing unit 1a and transferred therefrom to the cleaning

unit 7a, where it is cleaned. The cleaned semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the cleaning unit 7a to the reversing unit 6. The semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the reversing unit 6 to the cleaning unit 8a after being reversed in the reversing unit 6. Thereafter, the semiconductor wafer is transferred from the cleaning unit 8a to the storage cassette 2a after being cleaned and dried in the cleaning unit 8a.

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 15, line 2 to page 16, line 2 with the following rewritten paragraph:

In the other of the routes, as shown by broken lines, another semiconductor wafer is transferred from the storage cassette 2a to the reversing unit 5. The semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the reversing unit 5 to the polishing unit 1b after being reversed in the reversing unit 5. The semiconductor wafer is polished in the polishing unit 1b and transferred therefrom to the cleaning unit 7b, where it is cleaned. The cleaned semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the cleaning unit 7b to the reversing unit 6. The semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the reversing unit 6 to the cleaning unit 8b after being reversed in the reversing unit 6. Thereafter, the semiconductor wafer is cleaned and dried in the cleaning unit 8b, and transferred to the storage cassette 2a. The transfer robots 4a, 4b use the respective dry fingers when handling dry semiconductor wafers, and the respective wet fingers when handling wet semiconductor wafers. The reversing unit 5 handles a dry semiconductor wafer, and the reversing unit 6 handles a wet semiconductor wafer in the same way as in the serial processing. In the above parallel processing, the primary cleaning process is performed by the cleaning units 7a, 7b, and the secondary cleaning process is performed by the cleaning units 8a, 8b may be used. In the parallel processing, polishing conditions in the polishing units 1a, 1b may be the same, cleaning conditions in the cleaning units 7a, 7b may be the same, and cleaning conditions in the cleaning units 8a, 8b may be the same.

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 17, line 28 to page 18, line 6 with the following rewritten paragraph:

As is apparent from the above description, according to the present invention, the polishing apparatus can improve the quality and yield of workpieces by preventing the workpieces from being contaminated with an abrasive liquid used in a previous polishing process in a multi-stage polishing such as a two-stage polishing, and can polish workpieces simultaneously to increase throughput of the workpieces in a single-stage polishing.

REMARKS

The above amendments have been made pursuant to the filing of this new Divisional Application.

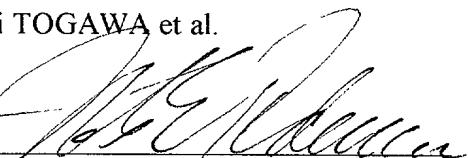
Attached hereto is a marked-up version of the changes made to the specification by the current Preliminary Amendment. The attached page is captioned "**Version With Markings to Show Changes Made**".

An early and favorable action on the merits is requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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polishing cloth 14 to apply a predetermined pressure to the polishing cloth 14. At the same time that or before the dressing element 19 contacts the polishing cloth 14, a dressing liquid such as water is supplied from the dressing liquid supply nozzle 21 to the upper surface of the polishing cloth 14. The dressing liquid is supplied for the purposes of discharging an abrasive liquid and ground-off particles of the semiconductor wafer which remain on the polishing cloth 14 and removing frictional heat that is generated by the engagement 10 between the dressing element 19 and the polishing cloth 14. The dressing liquid supplied to the polishing cloth 14 is then scattered outwardly off the turntable 9 into the frame 17 under centrifugal forces caused by the rotation of the turntable 9, and collected by the gutter 17a of the frame 17.

15 The cleaning units 7a, 7b and 8a, 8b may be of any desired types. For example, the cleaning units 7a, 7b which are positioned near the polishing units 1a, 1b may be of the type which scrubs both sides, i.e., face and reverse sides, of a semiconductor wafer with rollers having respective sponge 20 layers, and the cleaning units 8a, 8b which are positioned near the wafer storage cassettes 2a, 2b may be of the type which supplies a cleaning solution to a semiconductor wafer that is being held at its edge and rotated in a horizontal plane. Each of the cleaning units 8a, 8b also serves as a drying unit for 25 spin-drying a semiconductor wafer under centrifugal forces until it is dried. The cleaning units 7a, 7b can perform a primary cleaning of the semiconductor wafer, and the cleaning units 8a, 8b can perform a secondary cleaning of the

semiconductor wafer which has been subjected to the primary cleaning.

Each of the transfer robots 4a, 4b has an articulated arm mounted on a carriage which is movable along the rail 3.

5 The articulated arm is bendable in a horizontal plane. The articulated arm has, on each of upper and lower portions thereof, two grippers that can act as dry and wet fingers. The transfer robot 4a operates to cover a region ranging from the reversing units 5, 6 to the storage cassettes 2a, 2b, and the 10 transfer robot 4b operates to cover a region ranging from the reversing units 5, 6 to the polishing units 1a, 1b.

15 The reversing units 5, 6 are required in the illustrated embodiment because of the storage cassettes 2a, 2b which store semiconductor wafers with their surfaces, which are to be polished or have been polished, facing upwardly. 20 However, the reversing units 5, 6 may be dispensed with if semiconductor wafers are stored in the storage cassettes 2a, 2b with their surfaces, which are to be polished or have been polished, facing downwardly, and alternatively if the transfer robots 4a, 4b have a mechanism for reversing semiconductor wafers. In the illustrated embodiment, the reversing unit 5 serves to reverse a dry semiconductor wafer, and the reversing unit 6 serves to reverse a wet semiconductor wafer.

25 The polishing apparatus can be operated selectively in a series mode of polishing operation (hereinafter referred to as a serial processing) as shown in FIG. 4A and a parallel mode of polishing operation (hereinafter referred to as a parallel processing) as shown in FIG. 4B. The serial and

parallel processings will be described below.

FIGS. 4A and 4B show the states of the semiconductor wafers in respective positions; ① shows the position in which the semiconductor wafers are in the state of their surfaces, 5 which are to be polished or have been polished, facing upwardly; ② shows the position in which the semiconductor wafers are in the state of their surfaces, which are to be polished or have been polished, facing downwardly; ③ shows the position in which the semiconductor wafers are in the state of their 10 surfaces, which have been reversed and are to be polished, facing downwardly; and ④ shows the position in which the semiconductor wafers are in the state of their surfaces, which have been polished and reversed, facing upwardly.

(1) Serial processing (FIG. 4A):

In the serial processing, a semiconductor wafer is 15 polished by means of a two-stage polishing, and three out of the four cleaning units 7a, 7b, 8b are operated to clean 20 semiconductor wafers.

As shown by solid lines, a semiconductor wafer is 25 transferred from the storage cassette 2a to the reversing unit 5. The semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the reversing unit 5 to the first polishing unit 1a after ^{being} reversed in the reversing unit 5. The semiconductor wafer is polished in the first polishing unit 1a and transferred therefrom to the 30 cleaning unit 7a where it is cleaned. The cleaned semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the cleaning unit 7a to the second polishing unit 1b where it is polished. The 35

semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the second polishing unit 1b to the cleaning unit 7b where it is cleaned. The cleaned semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the cleaning unit 7b to the reversing unit 6. The semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the reversing unit 6 to the cleaning unit 8b after reversed in the reversing unit 6. The semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the cleaning unit 8b to the storage cassette 2a after ^{being} cleaned and dried in the cleaning unit 8b. The transfer robots 4a, 4b use the respective dry fingers when handling dry semiconductor wafers, and the respective wet fingers when handling wet semiconductor wafers. The pusher 12 of the polishing unit 1a, ^{which} receives the semiconductor wafer to be polished from the transfer robot 4b, is elevated and transfers the semiconductor wafer to the top ring 13 when the top ring 13 is positioned above the pusher 12. The semiconductor wafer which has been polished is rinsed by a rinsing liquid supplied from a rinsing liquid supply device which is provided at the pusher 12.

After the semiconductor wafer is applied to a primary polishing in the polishing unit 1a, the semiconductor wafer is removed from the top ring 13 of the polishing unit 1a, and rinsed at the position of the pusher 12, and then cleaned in the cleaning unit 7a. Therefore, any abrasive liquid containing abrasive grains adhering to the polished surface, the reverse side of the polished surface, and side edge of the semiconductor wafer due to the primary polishing in the polishing unit 1a is completely removed. Then, the semiconductor wafer is applied to a secondary polishing in the

polishing unit 1b, and then cleaned by the primary cleaning process of the cleaning unit 7b and the secondary cleaning process of the cleaning unit 8b. Thereafter, the polished and cleaned semiconductor wafer is spin-dried and returned to the 5 storage cassette 2a. In the serial processing, polishing conditions of the primary polishing and secondary polishing are different from each other.

(2) Parallel processing (FIG. 4B):

In the parallel processing, a semiconductor wafer is 10 polished in a single polishing process. Two semiconductor wafers are simultaneously polished, and all ^{of} ₁ the four cleaning units 7a, 7b, 8a, 8b are operated to clean semiconductor 15 wafers. One or both of the storage cassettes 2a, 2b may be used. In the illustrated embodiment, only the storage cassette 2a is used, and there are two routes in which semiconductor wafers are processed.

In one of the routes, as shown by solid lines, a semiconductor wafer is transferred from the storage cassette 2a to the reversing unit 5. The semiconductor wafer is then 20 transferred from the reversing unit 5 to the polishing unit 1a ^{being} after reversed in the reversing unit 5. The semiconductor wafer is polished in the polishing unit 1a and transferred therefrom to the cleaning unit 7a, where it is cleaned. The cleaned semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the 25 cleaning unit 7a to the reversing unit 6. The semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the reversing unit 6 to the cleaning unit 8a ^{being} after reversed in the reversing unit 6. Thereafter, the semiconductor wafer is transferred from the

being

cleaning unit 8a to the storage cassette 2a after cleaned and dried in the cleaning unit 8a.

In the other of the routes, as shown by broken lines, another semiconductor wafer is transferred from the storage cassette 2a to the reversing unit 5. The semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the reversing unit 5 to the polishing unit 1b after ^{being} reversed in the reversing unit 5. The semiconductor wafer is polished in the polishing unit 1b and transferred therefrom to the cleaning unit 7b, where it is cleaned. The cleaned semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the cleaning unit 7b to the reversing unit 6. The semiconductor wafer is then transferred from the reversing unit 6 to the cleaning unit 8b after ^{being} reversed in the reversing unit 6. Thereafter, the semiconductor wafer is cleaned and dried in the cleaning unit 8b, and transferred to the storage cassette 2a. The transfer robots 4a, 4b use the respective dry fingers when handling dry semiconductor wafers, and the respective wet fingers when handling wet semiconductor wafers. The reversing units 5 handles a dry semiconductor wafer, and the reversing unit 6 handles a wet semiconductor wafer in the same way as ⁱⁿ the serial processing. In the above parallel processing, the primary cleaning process is preformed by the cleaning units 7a, 7b, and the secondary cleaning process is preformed by the cleaning units 8a, 8b. For cleaning a semiconductor wafer, either one of the cleaning units 7a, 7b and either one of the cleaning units 8a, 8b may be used. In the parallel processing, polishing conditions in the polishing units 1a, 1b may be the same, cleaning conditions in the cleaning units 7a, 7b may be

the same, and cleaning conditions in the cleaning units 8a, 8b may be the same.

FIG. 5 schematically shows in plan a polishing apparatus according to a second embodiment of the present invention. The polishing apparatus according to the second embodiment differs from the polishing apparatus according to the first embodiment in that the transfer robots 4a, 4b do not move on a rail, but are fixedly installed in position. The polishing apparatus shown in FIG. 5 is suitable for use in applications where semiconductor wafers are not required to be transferred in a long distance, and is simpler in structure than the polishing apparatus shown in FIG. 1. In this embodiment, the transfer line also extends between the polishing units and the storage cassettes.

The number of cleaning units, the number of transfer robots, and the layout of these cleaning units and transfer robots may be modified. For example, if the polishing apparatus is not operated in the parallel processing, then the polishing apparatus needs only three cleaning units. Whether the reversing units are to be used, the number, layout, and type of reversing units, the type of transfer robots, and whether the pushers are to be used may also be selected or changed as desired.

Example:

Semiconductor wafers were actually polished by the polishing apparatus according to the present invention. In the serial processing, the abrasive liquid applied by the polishing unit 1a was not carried over to the polishing unit 1b, thus

causing no contamination to the semiconductor wafers.

The wafer processing efficiencies, i.e., the throughputs (the number of processed wafers/hour) of a comparative polishing apparatus and the inventive polishing apparatus in both the serial and parallel processings are shown in Table given below:

Table
TT: turntable

	Throughputs (the number of processed wafers/hour)		
	1TT compar- ative	2TT serial	2TT paral- lel
10			
processing time (seconds) per one wafer (1st TT / 2nd TT)	120/-	120/60	120/120
15			
1TT(comparative)	19		
20			
2TT(serial processing)		19	
25			
2TT(parallel processing)			38

The comparative polishing apparatus employed one turntable, a required number of cleaning units, a required number of reversing units, and a required number of transfer robots. In serial and parallel processings, two turntables and two top rings are employed. As can be seen from Table above, the inventive polishing apparatus in the parallel processing has a throughput per turntable which is comparable to that of the comparative polishing apparatus. Therefore, the inventive polishing apparatus in the parallel processing has a greatly increased wafer processing capability per floor space.

As is apparent from the above description, according to the present invention, the polishing apparatus can improve *efficiency*.

quality and yield of workpieces by preventing the workpieces from being contaminated with an abrasive liquid used in a previous polishing process in a multi-stage polishing such as a two-stage polishing, and can polish workpieces simultaneously 5 to increase throughput of the workpieces in a single-stage polishing.

Further, according to the present invention, a serial processing in which a two-stage polishing is performed and a parallel processing in which a single-stage polishing is 10 performed can be freely selected.

In the embodiments, although the top ring handles only one semiconductor wafer, the top ring may handle a plurality of semiconductor wafers simultaneously. A plurality of top rings may be provided in each polishing unit.

15. Although certain preferred embodiments of the present invention have been shown and described in detail, it should be understood that various changes and modifications may be made therein without departing from the scope of the appended claims.